DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 172 362 EA 011 763

TITLE	New School Board Members: A Portrait. Research Report 1979-1.
INSTITUTION	National School Boards Association, Washington, D.C.
PUB DATE	79
NOTE	40p.
AVAILABLE FROM	National School Boards Association, 1055 Thomas Jefferson Street, N.W., Washington, D.C. 20007 ($7.50; quantity discounts)
EDRS PRICE	MF01 Plus Postage. PC Not Available from EDRS.
DESCRIPTORS	*Board Candidates; *Boards of Education; Elections; Elementary Secondary Education; Group Norms; Individual Characteristics
IDENTIFIERS	*School Board Members

ABSTRACT

The period just before and just after a school board member is chosen is the basis for this report. Data were collected by polling 1,000 board members and conducting indepth interviews at the 1978 National School Boards Association Convention. The year preceding and the year following a board member's selection can be divided into the eligibility stage (when candidates decide to run), the campaign stage, and the socialization stage. Results of the poll indicated that previous experiences did not prepare board members for serving on boards. Respondents indicated that campaign issues in school board elections are often financial in nature with other issues like basic skills or superintendent performance also prevalent. The report is apparently the first study to use a national sample to explore specific campaign strategies used by school board candidates. The technique most often mentioned was that of talking to influential people. The survey also reveals that compaigners who are young, female, and from large districts in the South and East tend to be more active campaigners. The survey also revealed that for training and orientation, school board members rely most on individuals within their own districts. Other findings revealed common school board norms. (Author/JM)

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New School Board Members: A Portrait

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New School Board Members: A Portrait

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NSBA Research Report 1979-1
New School Board Members: A Portrait
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Foreword

Several recent NSBA Research Reports have focused on specific issues—the arts in education, minimum competency testing and the back-to-basics trend—confronting school boards throughout North America. With *New School Board Members: A Portrait* we turn our attention to board members themselves, the individuals who must deal with these issues.

The study that serves as the basis for this report was conducted in order to learn more about the new school board member. In a sense, it is an examination of a relatively short span of time in the life of a board member—that period just before and just after he or she is chosen to serve on a local board.

To better understand the motivations behind board candidacy, the rites of campaigning and the transition from novice to experienced board member, nearly 1,000 board members were polled at the 1978 NSBA Convention in Anaheim, California. In-depth interviews also were conducted with several board members in order to obtain the more personal and in-depth information which cannot be obtained from responses to a questionnaire. Comments from these board members will be found throughout the report.

As one of its key, ongoing priorities, NSBA will continue to study the attitudes and experiences of local school board members. For truly, today's new board member is shaping tomorrow's education.

Thomas A. Shannon
Executive Director
National School Boards Association

Introduction

The short period of time studied in this report--roughly a year preceding and a year following a board member's selection—might be divided into three separate stages.[1] The first might be termed the **eligibility** stage. During this period, from the many potential candidates who are legally qualified to be school board members, a relative handful decide they are interested in serving on the board and that they possess the required resources, talents, and motivation to become viable candidates for the position. It should be made clear at the outset that, in most cases, this is a *political* decision since roughly 95% of all school board members are elected and virtually all non-elective school board positions are filled by elected political officials.

The second stage in pursuing a school board position can be termed the **campaign** stage. Even though the campaign experiences of board members vary greatly from one section of the country to another, and from one school district to the next, it is always a political process.

Socialization is the final stage new board members go through. During this period, which lasts about a year, school board members progress from "apprentices" to experienced decision-makers. During this time they undergo some form of training or orientation process, either formal or informal. Again, this process varies greatly: in some areas, it is unstructured and almost nonexistent, while it is an intensive, highly systematic process in other districts. However, regardless of the process by which board members are "trained," at the end of a year or so, most have a fairly well-defined idea of the "proper" role of a school board member and how they should relate to this role.

New board members do not begin from zero; most already have had a variety of experiences in their communities—experiences which are potentially applicable to their work on the school board. Many have been PTA members, have attended numerous board meetings, have served on the boards of organizations or corporations, or have been active on school committees. Some have been employed by school systems or government agencies, while others have been candidates for office—either the school board or another position.

However, the NSBA convention survey reveals that these experiences did not really prepare board members for what they were going to face. Findings which are analyzed later suggest that the items of school board business that new board members had expected to deal with were not the concerns they actually did encounter upon assuming office. For example, before taking office, board members anticipated spending much time and effort considering school curriculum matters but later found that this was not a major item of business.

The survey also provides a good deal of insight into the campaign for the school board, an experience familiar to more than 90% of board members serving in elected positions. While most board elections are contested—those where two or more candidates vie for

one position—by and large, board members win their elections by fairly wide margins. Campaign issues in school board elections often are financial in nature—school taxes and rising costs were most often named by respondents—but other issues like "back to basics," the superintendent's performance and discipline also are prevalent.

This report apparently is the first study which uses a national sample of board members to explore specific campaign strategies used by these individuals. The technique of talking to influential people was mentioned by far more board members than any other. This finding underscores the informal, indirect approach to campaigning which seems to be typical in most school board elections. However, substantial numbers of board members also report using more traditional campaign tactics such as door-to-door campaigning, making speeches to community groups, and buying newpaper ads.

The survey also reveals that certain groups of prospective board members tend to be more active campaigners than the typical candidate. Included here are candidates from the South and East, those from larger districts, young people and female candidates. Data on campaign expenditures show that the largest proportion of candidates (40%) spent no money at all in their campaign, while more than three-fourths of the total spent less than $100 of their own financial resources.

An extensive examination of school board training and orientation practices uncovers a significant finding: school board members rely most on individuals within their own districts—specifically upon experienced board members and the superintendent—for their training and orientation. Moreover, most board members report that it takes them at least a year before they feel capable and comfortable as board members.

Perhaps the most interesting set of findings emerging from the 1978 survey involves unwritten, informal rules of behavior, or "norms," which many board members allow to govern their actions as local school decision-makers. If these norms are accepted as legitimate and "obeyed," then board members are said to be *socialized* to behave according to these unwritten rules. Several of the norms which are examined in this report do appear to have this acceptance; furthermore, the respondents to the survey generally consider them to be "wise" rules. Most of these operating norms relate to fairly routine matters like maintaining cordial interpersonal relationships and learning school board procedures. However, two generally accepted norms deal with more political functions: representation and voting. Acceptable behavior as a board member, according to most of the survey respondents, includes representing all the people in the school district rather than specific groups, but it does not include "trading votes"—voting for a colleague's proposal in return for a vote you favor.

The Sketch: Characteristics of Potential Board Members

How are school board members different from other citizens? What special characteristics do they possess which allowed them to emerge from the community as prospective candidates for the school board? Many previous studies, beginning with the landmark work of George Counts and continuing to very recent reports,[2] have indicated that the typical board member is not necessarily representative of the "average citizen;" he tends to be upper or upper-middle class, middle-aged, male, a business or professional person, married, a parent of children in public school, and active in the organizational life of the community.[3] A very recent study conducted by NSBA reported that its picture of the typical board member "does not seriously challenge" the stereotype suggested above.[4]

TABLE 1

Prior Activities and Experience of Board Members

Before you began service on the board, in which of the following activities had you participated? (Check all that apply.)

Experience*	%
PTA member	49
Service on an organization board	44
Attendance at 5 board meetings or more during previous year	37
Service on school board/school administration committee	30
PTA officer	29
Attendance at 1-4 board meetings during previous year	27
Employment by a public school system	18
Service on a corporation board	13
Unsuccessful school board candidate	12
Candidate in a non-school board election	11
Service in a governmental position	10

* Note: this is not the order in which alternatives were listed

The scope of past activities

Most individuals responding to the 1978 NSBA Convention Survey had, at the time they began school board service, already been involved in activities and experiences that potentially could contribute to their ability to serve as effective board members. Table 1 lists several such experiences. When asked whether they had participated in these activities, more than 90% of the respondents to the 1978 survey checked at least one of the alternatives. Three-fourths of the board members were involved in at least two of the activities, while fully one-third of the respondents checked at least four.

Table 1 indicates that service as a PTA member is the activity in which the largest number of board members (nearly half of all responding) have participated; service on the board of an organization was reported by more than 40%, while more than 30% had attended at least five board meetings and/or had served on a school board or school administration committee.

It is revealing to learn what kinds of board members have participated in each of these activities. For example, male board members are more likely than females to have been candidates for other elective positions, to have held governmental positions and to have served on corporation boards. Females, on the other hand, are more inclined to have

been employed by a school system, to have attended at least five board meetings and to have served on a school board or school administration committee. Also, as might be expected, female board members are much more likely than their male counterparts to have been active in PTA, either as members or as officers.

Board members also have certain regional characteristics. Eastern board members, for instance, are more likely than their counterparts in the Midwest and South to have served on a company's board of directors. Southern board members, however, are more likely than board members from other regions to have been PTA members but less likely to have attended at least five board meetings prior to their selection. Eastern board members are much more likely than those from other regions to have attended at least five meetings. PTA involvement, either membership or leadership, appears to be least likely for midwestern board members.

The type of district in which board members serve clearly relates to the kind of pre-board activities in which they have been involved. For example, board members from very large districts (25,000 or more students) are more likely to have served in governmental positions, to have been employed by public school systems, and to have been previous unsuccessful school board candidates. Generally speaking, the larger the school district, the more likely board members are to have had experience as PTA members or officers. Board members in large districts (10,000-24,999) are most likely to have served on school board-school administration committees, while members from moderately large districts (5,000-9,999) are most likely to have attended at least five board meetings prior to selection.

Board members from urban districts are most likely to have been employed by a public school system, to have been unsuccessful school board candidates, and to have served on noncorporate organization boards. Urban and suburban board members are more apt than small town or rural board members to have been PTA officers. Suburban board members are most likely to have been PTA members, members of school board committees, and to have attended at least five board meetings prior to their selection. Members from rural districts are most likely to have been candidates in non-school board elections.

Older board members—those over 40 when initially selected—are more likely to have served in governmental positions, to have been PTA members and to have served on a school board committee. Board members under 40, on the other hand, are more likely to have attended at least five board meetings.

Some interesting findings emerge when the circumstances surrounding the board member's selection are compared with prior experiences. For example, board members serving in appointed rather than elected school board positions are more likely to have had experience on corporation boards while those who have been PTA officers are most likely to have been appointed to fill a vacancy on an elected board. Board members who previously have been defeated in a school board race are more likely to have won a close election, while those who have attended several school board meetings and those who have been PTA officers have tended to win by greater margins.

Board members' knowledge—and lack of knowledge—about the school board

Given the breadth and significance of new board members' service and activities, it would be reasonable to expect that they would be fairly well-equipped to function effectively almost immediately. However, much of the evidence from the 1978 survey suggests that this is not the case; the inability of new board members to "take hold" at the beginning of their terms will be a continuing theme of this report.

The information in Table 2 provides some clues to this problem. Generally speaking, the concerns board members *expected* to face before being selected were not the concerns they actually did face upon assuming their

positions. An examination of Table 2 indicates that prior to board service, board members expected to deal with the following items (in order of mention):

- curriculum decisions
- school expenditures
- hiring teachers
- school taxes

Once in office, however, board members found themselves dealing with a different agenda (in order of mention):

- collective bargaining
- school expenditures
- new school buildings

These figures provide some support for the assertions made nearly fifteen years ago by Norman Kerr, whose study of school board socialization is reviewed later in this report. One of Kerr's major arguments is that school board members are socialized (trained and oriented) by the school administration to become less involved in decisions relating to the curriculum and the educational program, and more involved in decisions relating to finances and buildings.

TABLE 2
Board Members' Perceptions of School Board Responsibilities

Below are listed several areas of school board concern. In column A, check the two areas you ***thought*** *the school board would deal with the most before you became a board member. In column B, check the two areas you found you actually did deal with the most.*

	% Saying this was an expected concern	% Saying this was an actual concern
School expenditures	19	16
School taxes	12	9
Hiring teachers	14	4
Hiring administrators	7	8
Curriculum decisions	27	6
Textbook selection	3	1
Transportation (including busing)	3	6
New school buildings	8	14
Decisions involving enrollment	3	7
Collective bargaining	5	24
Discipline	8	6

Another interpretation of the information in Table 2 leads to a different conclusion—that board members simply do not know what to expect on the board in spite of all their prior experiences. After all, most board members would agree that until a person actually sits in the "hot seat" he really doesn't understand how it feels. Furthermore, information already presented (in Table 1) indicates that more than one-third of all board members acknowledge that they have never attended a board meeting prior to their selection; nearly two-thirds had attended fewer than five meetings.

An examination of the data in Table 2 reveals that only in the area of school expenditures were more board members "right" than "wrong" in assuming that they would be dealing with an item. The respondents were *most* wrong about the following concerns: curriculum decisions, collective bargaining, hiring teachers, school taxes, hiring administrators, new buildings, and discipline. As was suggested earlier, for curriculum decisions and decisions about hiring teachers, board members erred more often on the side of expecting to deal with these matters more often than they actually did. For decisions involving collective bargaining and new buildings, the error was in not expecting to deal with these matters as often as they did. For the remaining items—involving taxes, hiring administrators, and discipline—roughly the same degree of error was found.

It is very difficult to try to determine why new school board members seem to be significantly off in their expectations of board service. None of the prior activities discussed earlier (see Table 1), with the possible exception of service on a corporation board of directors, seemed to substantially reduce these perceptual errors. Even those board members who have attended as many as five school board meetings prior to taking office tend to experience the same "surprises" when they begin serving. A board member from Illinois confirmed this during an interview in Anaheim. Even though he had attended every board meeting for a year before he ran, he was surprised to find that he was not involved in nearly as many decisions about

textbooks and the curriculum as he had anticipated.

These findings suggest that the training and development of new board members, which will be discussed later, are crucial, and that orientation programs for school board *candidates*, which presently are offered in a few school districts, may well be both helpful and necessary. The findings also reflect a more general problem: the public's woeful ignorance of the role and function of the school board. As a 1975 NSBA-commissioned Gallup poll revealed, ". . . most adults don't understand what their local school boards are doing, nor indeed what their local boards are."[5] While it is beyond the scope of this report to discuss this problem, it may have to be attacked and resolved in order to improve the knowledge and information level of prospective school board members.

The effect of prior activities on school board performance

While prior activities and experiences may not adequately prepare new school board members for what they will face on the board, these activities may shorten the *time* it takes to become an effective, functioning member. While the average school board member seems to take about a year to reach this level of performance, the 1978 survey findings suggest that certain background experiences shorten the stage of apprenticeship; a good number of board members become effective in a much shorter period of time.

The following types of activities seem to significantly decrease the amount of time it takes for board members to feel "capable, comfortable, and fully informed" (see survey question #16 in Appendix C):

1. Service in a government position
2. Attendance at five board meetings or more
3. Employment by a public school system
4. Candidacy in a non-school board election
5. Service on a school board committee
6. Previous unsuccessful school board candidacy

Other kinds of service do not have a noticeable impact on the length of time it takes for a new board member to fully integrate his new responsibilities and duties.

These findings suggest that the best advice for a potential school board candidate would be to get involved in local school district affairs. Obviously, items 1, 3 and 4 above are not feasible alternatives for most prospective board members, and most folks would undoubtedly prefer to avoid item 6, electoral defeat. However, nearly all potential board members can volunteer to serve on a school district committee and can attend board meetings, assuming meetings are held at a reasonably accessible time.[6] These two activities appear to be the best ways to prepare for school board service. These experiences also are likely to be helpful during the next stage in the life of a prospective board member, the campaign.

The Medium: Campaign Issues and Strategies

The most explicitly political period in the life of most board members is the campaign for election, an experience that the vast majority of prospective board members must endure. For some reason, this topic has received scant attention from educational researchers. What little research there is has focused on the kinds of organizations that sponsor or screen potential school board candidates, thereby performing a function which political parties usually carry out for other elective offices. The most influential study of school boards published in this decade has concluded that systematic efforts by religious or racial groups[7] and nominating caucuses[8]—groups that in the past have been mentioned as sponsoring agents—are not common. This study, by Zeigler and Jennings,[9] emphasized the important role played by incumbent board members in encouraging the candidacies of new board members. Their conclusion echoes a much earlier argument of Keith Goldhammer that school boards are "self-perpetuating" institutions.[10]

Because of the lack of research on school board campaigns, most knowledge of this subject is based on informal observations and anecdotal discussions of school board members about their campaign experiences. Conversations with board members suggest that they face this experience with a variety of feelings. Some find it distasteful or, at best, a necessary evil, while other candidates face the prospects of a campaign much more positively. Either way, the campaign is a valuable learning experience, both to determine key education issues in the district and to better acquaint the prospective board member and his prospective constituents.

The prevailing wisdom regarding school board campaigns and elections suggests an absence of competition for school board seats.[11] Data from the 1978 survey confirm this assertion in some respects but challenge it in others. When asked about competition during their *first* campaign for the board, 85% of the respondents said they had at least one opponent—in fact, 60% said they had more than one opponent. However, another set of responses paints a rather different picture of electoral competition. More than three-fourths of the board members said they won their first election by a sizeable margin—ten percent or more. Only 23% reported winning an election where the margin of victory was less than ten percent.

The noncompetitive nature of the majority of school board elections is underscored by the fact that all respondents to this survey were recounting their *first* election to the board. From what is known about incumbents running for re-election—that they are likely to have an easier time of it than challengers or "first-timers"—it can be assumed that the above figures probably overstate the degree of competition in the average school board election.

Of course, this generalization is more valid in certain districts than in others. As expected, board candidates in smaller school districts are more likely to have little or no opposition. Similarly, candidates running in urban districts are most likely to have at least one

opponent; the proportion of contested elections is similar for rural, small town, and suburban districts.

Findings concerning the closeness of elections revealed that southern school districts are most likely to have candidates winning by margins of ten percent or more of the votes cast. Both women and candidates aged 60 or more are most likely to report winning by wide margins. Small town districts are most apt to have close contests while elections in urban districts are least likely to be closely contested, in spite of the large number of candidates.

What were the campaign issues that board members confronted in their first campaigns? As Table 3 indicates, issues mentioned by the largest number of respondents were (in order): school taxes, rising costs, "back to basics," the superintendent's performance, and student discipline. Other contemporary issues—such as teacher militancy, busing, declining enrollment, and the textbook controversy—which recently have received attention in the national media and in education circles apparently were much less important to these respondents. Again, however, it must be remembered that respondents were recounting their first campaigns and as such were frequently reporting experiences that took place some time ago.

TABLE 3

Important Campaign Issues in Board Members' First Campaign

In your first campaign for the school board, were any of the following important campaign issues? If so, check the most important (up to three).

Issue	%
Student discipline	20
Teacher militancy	6
Rising costs	25
School taxes	28
Drop-out rates	2
"Back-to-basics"	23
Appropriate textbooks	4
The superintendent's performance	22
Accountability	17
Federal interference	2
Busing	5
Declining enrollment	8
Declining student achievement	12
Other	16

It should come as no surprise to readers that the two most-mentioned campaign issues were financial in nature. Taxes and rising costs clearly are perennial issues in school board campaigns. Discipline also has become a perennial public concern, having appeared at the top of the list of problems reported in Gallup's annual poll of public attitudes toward education in nine of the last ten years.[12] Gallup also confirms the importance of the "back to basics" movement in the recent past and present. His most recent (1978) survey suggests that even though many school systems have already made changes to give more attention to the so-called basics, "... many people want greater emphasis placed upon what they describe as the 'fundamentals,' meaning reading, writing, and arithmetic."[13]

Thus, the only unexpected finding in Table 3 may be the large number of respondents who checked "the superintendent's performance" as a major campaign issue. However, this may not be a surprise at all to board members who are aware of the high turnover rate among superintendents and its close relationship to turnover on the school board.[14] More generally, it often is the executive in any kind of election—be it president, governor or mayor—who is the focus of much campaign discussion, particularly when there is dissatisfaction with present policies. Since the analogy between school board and political elections was made earlier, it should not be surprising that school board campaigns resemble other political contests which often are more partisan in nature.

Campaign strategies

What about the specific campaign strategies that are used by school board candidates? Since no previous studies exist which report in a systematic way the campaign strategies used by successful school board candidates, the NSBA survey provided respondents with a list of possible strategies and asked to what extent each was used in their own campaigns. Their responses are presented in Table 4 (see Appendix A). The strategy of talking to influential people in the community was mentioned by far more board mem-

bers than any other alternative listed. Apparently, most board members believe this kind of informal, indirect approach is the most appropriate campaign technique for a prospective school board member.

Several other strategies were mentioned by substantial numbers of board members. At least one-half of all respondents indicated that they used one or more of the following strategies "some" or "a great deal":

Strategy	*% Using*
Door-to-door campaigning	58
Speeches to civic groups	56
Seeking free newspaper exposure	53
Buying newspaper ads	52

Other strategies, including mobilizing a campaign organization (49%), speeches to educational groups (48%), seeking endorsements (44%) and sponsoring coffees (38%), were used by a sizeable number of the respondents. Little-used strategies include campaigning in shopping centers, seeking free radio or television exposure and buying radio or television ads.

In summary, most school board candidates employ informal, personal, time-consuming but relatively inexpensive campaign strategies. It is worth noting, also, that the most-used methods of campaigning involve two-way communication between a candidate and his potential constituents. This gives prospective board members valuable insight into concerns the people in the school district have about education.

Innovative tactics

Interviews with school board members revealed some interesting variations on the aforementioned campaign techniques. For example, one board member from Alaska mobilized the support of several interest groups in the community and received both financial and manpower assistance from these organizations. He received support and money from groups like teachers' organizations, senior citizens' groups, the NAACP, student organizations and labor unions. A total of nearly $4000 was raised on his behalf. This particular board member also joined with two other candidates to form a "slate." Several interviewees mentioned using members of their families as the basis of their campaign organizations. A board member from Missouri recounted that his own children distributed 27,500 of his flyers to homes in the school district. A board member from Minnesota used a combination of "endorsements" and newspaper ad strategies—she ran a newspaper ad containing the names of her supporters. While this board member spent only a very small amount of money in her campaign, she received much help from friends who sponsored coffees on her behalf, and she made certain that representatives from key community groups were invited.

Relationship of strategies to candidate characteristics

Are some strategies used more often in certain districts and by certain kinds of board candidates? Generally, the findings do not suggest substantial differences among people who utilize the various strategies; rather, candidates with certain characteristics tend to use most or all of the strategies listed. That is, they simply go "all-out" in their campaign efforts.

Specifically, candidates from the South and East, from urban and suburban districts, from districts with at least 10,000 students, female candidates, and candidates in their 30's and 40's, *generally speaking*, are most likely to use more campaign techniques than did respondents with other characteristics. To be even more specific as to regional differences, candidates in the East tend especially to seek free newspaper exposure, to campaign door-to-door, to sponsor coffees, to make speeches before civic and educational groups and to mobilize campaign organizations. Candidates in the South are more apt to buy newspaper, radio and television ads and to seek free radio and television coverage.

While women candidates tend to use a greater variety of campaign strategies than

their male counterparts, they particularly prefer door-to-door contacts, sponsoring coffees and making speeches to both civic and educational groups.

As might be expected, urban candidates tend to employ media strategies of all kinds, especially radio and television. They also campaign more often in shopping centers. Suburban candidates, while using many of these same techniques, particularly emphasize talking with influential people, campaigning door-to-door and sponsoring coffees.

Many of the findings concerning campaign strategies are reinforced by other survey results pertaining to the amount of money spent by board members during their first campaigns. Some of these results are presented in Tables 5 and 6 (see Appendix A).

The cost of a campaign

Table 5 provides information about total campaign expenditures for school board candidates broken down into personal ("out-of-pocket") expenses and campaign money donated by the candidates' supporters. It is interesting to note that 40% of the respondents said they personally spent no money at all in their first campaign while more than 60% said no money was spent on their behalf by supporters. Roughly half of the responding board members reported spending modest amounts of money—less than $500. The figures in Table 5 reveal that substantial sums of money—more than $500—were spent "out-of-pocket" by only five percent of all board members, while only 15% of the board members reported total expenditures in this amount. Clearly, in most school districts, a candidate does not have to spend a great deal of money to have a good chance of being elected to the school board.

Table 6 provides some further breakdowns of the campaign expenditure data by region, sex of respondent and type of district. Data from this table tend to reinforce earlier findings regarding the use of campaign techniques and strategies. For example, the regional breakdowns reflect earlier findings which suggest that southern and eastern board members were more "active" campaigners. An obvious corollary to this conclusion: southern board members spend more money during the campaign. Or, conversely, candidates from the South and East have more money to spend, which accounts for their more active campaigns. Southern and eastern board members are least likely to have reported spending no money in their first campaign. The southern respondents, however, clearly are the biggest spenders, with 30% of this group—twice the total sample's average—reporting expenditures of more than $500. The fact that southern candidates spend more than eastern candidates may well reflect the more expensive campaign strategies they seem to prefer. A related reason could be the relatively large size of school districts in southern states.

The sex-related differences in campaign spending correspond to earlier findings which suggest that women are more active campaigners. Compared to their male counterparts, a significantly smaller proportion of the female respondents report spending no money, and more than 40% of the women spent more than $100. About one-third of the men spent this amount. The differences in expenditures between men and women are somewhat under-represented in the statistics, however, since women tend to employ less expensive campaign strategies such as door-to-door campaigning and giving speeches to local groups.

The most striking differences in campaign spending levels are related to the type of district—urban, suburban, small town, or rural—in which the candidate campaigns. There is a definite rank-ordering here, with urban candidates spending the most, followed, in order, by suburban, small town and rural candidates. Notice that a clear majority of urban candidates (56%) said they spent more than $500, a far higher proportion than for any of the other candidate groups. While suburban candidates are as likely as urban candidates to spend some money, they tend to spend more modest amounts, again reflecting the varying costs of different campaign tactics. As noted earlier, urban candidates opt

for higher-priced media-related strategies while suburban candidates rely more on inexpensive, person-to-person methods to win votes and support.

Some explanations for differences in campaign practices

How can we explain these differences that we have discovered in school board campaign practices? Most relate to the nature of the school district and to specific characteristics and resources of the candidate.

Obviously, candidates in large districts and in urban or suburban districts would need to be more active campaigners because of the size and complexity of the electorate in these areas. Thus, they naturally would be expected to use a variety of campaign tactics. Candidates in small, rural, or small town districts, on the other hand, can more logically rely on fewer and more modest campaign efforts, with a greater emphasis on the personal, day-to-day contacts they have established.

Differences related to the region and sex of the candidate are not as easy to explain or interpret. One possible determinant of the greater campaign activity of women is the element of *time*. In spite of the fact that more and more women have jobs outside the home, nearly 60% of all female respondents listed "housewife" as their occupation. While this does not necessarily mean that they have an excess of time during which to campaign, it does suggest that they may have a more flexible schedule into which they could fit campaign activities.

Another possible explanation relates to the perceived difficulty in winning election to the school board. While female school board candidates apparently are becoming more numerous each year,[15] many women school board members would probably argue that it is still more difficult for a woman to be elected to the board. Several articles have been written cataloging some of the obstacles faced by female candidates. Most prominently mentioned are informal quota systems limiting the number of female "slots" on a particular board and the negative attitudes toward women which are allegedly held by many superintendents.[16] If these arguments are valid,[17] this would provide a partial explanation for the more extensive campaigning efforts of female candidates—that is, they need to do it.

In addition, some prior research would suggest that women school board members and candidates see school board service as more explicitly *political* activity. For example, research based on a 1975 NSBA convention survey found that women respondents, in defining the role of a school board member, tended to mention activities like "hearing complaints and grievances of parents" and "maintaining contact with state and federal legislators" much more than did their male counterparts.[18] That is, they seemed to emphasize both the representation of constituents and communication with other political officials—activities which have a clear political dimension. The same study found that women were more likely than men to define the school board as being like a *legislature* rather than like a *corporation board of trustees*.[19] Finally, the 1975 NSBA study found that women were more likely than men to be contacted by representatives of interest groups.[20] Thus, if these findings are valid—if women board members are more political than men in their orientations—perhaps they campaign more not only because they need to but also because they like to campaign.

Regional differences

Regional differences in campaign practices are even more difficult to explain than sex-related differences, since there is no evidence to support the notion that it is harder to get elected in the South or the East than in the West or Midwest. Nor is there reason to suggest that eastern and southern board members are somehow more politically oriented than are their counterparts in other regions. The only such evidence is from the 1975 survey just cited, which revealed that southern and eastern board members are contacted more often by interest group representatives than are western and midwestern

board members. We must leave to future studies the exploration of these regional differences in more detail.[21]

School board campaigns—not unique

One final question might yield an appropriate conclusion for this chapter: how do school board campaigns compare with campaigns for other political offices? The answer: school board campaigns seem to be very similar to other campaigns which are *nonpartisan* and conducted at the *local level*. Most board members clearly place a great deal of importance on the nonpartisan nature of school board elections. In our survey, board members overwhelmingly rejected the proposition that school board elections should be partisan (Republican-Democrat) rather than nonpartisan. Only seven percent of the respondents agreed with the statement.

However, the local nature of the school board campaign probably is more important than the nonpartisan aspect. Most local elections are nonpartisan, and the campaign strategies used by local candidates, especially local *legislative* candidates such as city councilmen, city and county commissioners, and township trustees, are very similar to those which have been described here for school board members. Even the issues are similar. Most local candidates confront issues like rising costs, taxes, accountability, and the performance of the chief administrator. Moreover, non-education issues often parallel those which were found important in school elections—issues such as "law and order" (discipline) and the emphasis on essential services ("back-to-basics"). In conclusion, then, a school board candidate's campaign trail is quite similar to the one faced by his or her colleagues who are running for other local, nonpartisan offices.

Mixing the Palette: Training and Orientation

The campaign is over. You won.

Now what?

While most board members assume office with some idea of what they would like to accomplish, they soon learn that being an educational decision-maker is a much more complex job than they had imagined. Many electees also soon realize that what happens in school board meetings is not what they had expected to happen. And most of them quickly see the need for some kind of training and orientation which will help them effectively deal with the new and unexpected duties. What opportunities and resources are available during these first crucial months?

Previous studies, along with conversations with individual board members, suggest that training and orientation opportunities vary greatly from one district to another. Even a few personal interviews conveyed wide variations in orientation procedures. One board member from Ohio, for instance, insisted she had no orientation at all. Her superintendent did not even explain the swearing-in process. However, a board member from California described an interesting way she and two other new board members were trained. In order to provide intensive, on-the-job training, the superintendent asked the board to hold regular meetings more often than usual (once a week) to allow the new board members to "get the hang of it" more quickly. When they felt "ready," the board resumed its once-a-month schedule of meetings.

Most of the board members interviewed in Anaheim seemed to believe that they should have received more or better orientation as new board members. While a board member from Minnesota described the "fantastic orientation" given by her state association, others were less enthusiastic; most of those interviewed seemed to feel that something was missing from their orientation experience. Several board members considered the NSBA convention to be helpful in filling in the gaps in their orientation.

Unfortunately, the 1978 convention survey did not ask board members to evaluate their orientation experiences. Our questions tended to emphasize *description* rather than *evaluation*. However, the survey responses infer that board members seem to be generally satisfied with their orientations, especially those programs offered by their state school boards associations. However, as the interviews suggested, there is room for improvement in the orientation process.

Who is responsible for orientation?

Most of the important information that was learned about the new board member orientation process is summarized in Tables 7 and 8. When asked to indicate where the major responsibility for orientation in each area fell, board members most often singled out the superintendent (see Table 7, Appendix A). The superintendent was mentioned by a majority of the respondents in all of the following decision areas: the hiring process, the budget process, the district's written policies, facts about the local district and issues currently before the board. The superintendent and the school board president are each

mentioned by about one-third of the respondents as being responsible for orientation about school board procedures. About one-fifth said that the superintendent informs them of the state association's program.

Significantly, orientation concerning the proper *role* of a school board member—probably the most confusing aspect of boardsmanship—is the area where there is the least agreement among board members about who is responsible for training. Responses were fairly evenly distributed, with the state school boards association being most often mentioned (31%), followed by the president of the school board (25%), the superintendent (21%), and the new board member himself (20%). This clearly reflects the variation in training-orientation experiences already discussed. It also suggests uncertainty concerning *what* board members should be told about their role and *who* it is that should tell them.

The data in Table 7 also provides some support for the feeling of inadequate orientation expressed by several of the interviewed board members. Notice that a substantial minority of board members, as many as 20% in some cases, said that "the new board member" took the major responsibility for orientation in certain areas: that is, the board members were on their own to learn as best they could. Along with these, the unusually large number of non-responses to some of the items in this question (anywhere from 14% to 21% of the total) should be considered, since it may be an indication that many board members had so little knowledge or experience concerning orientation that they simply could not respond to this question.

The role of experienced board members

A slightly different perspective on this issue is provided by the findings presented in Table 8. Here, board members were asked to consider the entire experience of learning to become an effective board member and to make a judgment as to who or what helped them the most. Responses indicate that most board members rely most heavily on two sources of assistance—their more experienced colleagues and/or their superintendent. These two categories received far more support than any of the other choices listed.

TABLE 8

Resources for New Board Members

Consider all the people, resources, and opportunities which help a person become an effective board member. In your experience, which of the following are most helpful? (Check up to 3.)

Resource	%
Experienced board member(s)	74
Superintendent	67
Other staff professionals (teachers & principals)	20
State department of education orientation sessions	7
Boardsmanship handbook	20
State association orientation sessions	31
State association publications	20
Regular state association conventions	20
NSBA Convention	25
NSBA publications	11
NSBA Academy programs	2
Other	7

Other helpful services checked by a substantial number of board members (at least 20%) include state association orientation sessions, the NSBA convention, other staff professionals, a boardsmanship handbook, state association conventions and state association publications.

Some interesting findings emerge when responses to the question in Table 8 are compared with characteristics of those responding. Reliance on experienced board members for orientation is most likely in the East and Midwest, in small towns and suburbs, and by male board members. The superintendent was mentioned most often as a major source of assistance by young board members (in their 30's) and by appointed board members; the superintendent was mentioned least often by eastern board members and those from urban areas.

State association orientation sessions are most likely to be relied on by females, by board members in their 50's, by elected board members and by respondents from rural areas. Handbooks were mentioned more often by southern and western board members and

by board members who were older (over 50), who have held elective positions, and by those who represented rural or small-town school districts.

The role of state associations

Because state association orientation sessions and boardsmanship handbooks traditionally have been central aspects of the school board member orientation process, two questions focused specifically on these services. Responses to the question on state association orientation workshops revealed that almost three-fourths of the board members had attended such conferences. Of those who had attended, the vast majority (85%) found them to be useful or invaluable; only about 15% found them to be "not very useful." Put another way, when all respondents are considered, most board members found workshops to be useful (50%) or invaluable (13%), but more than one third of the total either did not attend a workshop (26%) or found the one they attended to be not very useful (11%). On the whole, responses to this question suggest that most school board members are generally satisfied with the state association-sponsored orientation sessions.

Very young board members (those under 30) and those from urban districts were most likely to de-emphasize the usefulness of state association workshops. About half of the board members from these two groups either did not attend a workshop or found it not very useful. Among the under-30 group, most (42%) had not attended a state orientation session.

The question on handbooks revealed that less than half of the board members use a handbook on boardsmanship as a reference source; eight percent of the respondents refer to it "all the time" while 38% use it occasionally. Nearly 40% read the handbook only when they received it, while two percent never read the one they received. Overall, 13% of the respondents had not received an orientation handbook.

The element of time

One indicator of the quality of a new board member's orientation experience is the length of time it takes before he feels he is no longer a novice. In the 1978 survey, we asked board members to state approximately how long it took to become a capable, comfortable, fully-informed member of the school board. The responses:

3 months or less	17%
4-6 months	20%
7-11 months	10%
One year	28%
Longer than one year	25%

It is striking to observe from these responses that more than half of the board members believe they were not fully informed for at least a year after selection. Since recent figures show that one board member in four is newly selected each year, this means that at any given time upwards of 10% of all board members are, by their own admission, still "learning the ropes." Clearly this suggests a waste of human resources which needs to be overcome in some way.

Those board members who learned more quickly—at least by their own estimate—tend to be younger (under 30), those in very large districts (25,000 students or more), those with less than one year's service (whose responses should be tempered given their limited time perspective) and those in urban districts. In each of these groups, a larger-than-average proportion reported feeling "comfortable" in six months or less. Neither the regional identification nor the sex of the board member significantly affected the responses to this question.

Thus, the 1978 convention survey provided much useful information about how new board members are trained during their initial period of service on the school board—information which might be used to improve the training and orientation of newly-selected board members. Two major points should be kept in mind:

- Board members rely more heavily on people and personal interaction than on written materials for their orientation, training and information; and,
- The people upon whom they rely most heavily are in their own districts—usually experienced board members or the superintendent.

Transition: Socialization

In the previous chapter, the *how* of school board member training and orientation was the chief consideration. This chapter looks at *what* new board members learn in the process.

Learning the proper role of a board member is a major focus of this chapter because this is often acknowledged as the most difficult and most important part of the school board member learning experience. In deciding what their proper role *should* be, new school board members must come to terms with how they will relate to other significant individuals and groups in the entire educational decision-making process. These "significant others" in this chapter will generally be limited to three: the superintendent, the "public," and fellow board members.

The 'proper' role

There is no standard model or formula for the role of the school board member. In fact, James D. Koerner has called the school board position the most ill-defined post in local government.[22] Most school board members will experience confusion about their role as they learn that they simultaneously are officers of the state government, elected representatives of people in a local constituency, and governors of a school enterprise in conjunction with a superintendent they appoint.[23]

Much of the confusion surrounding the role of school board members can be linked to the difficulty in defining exactly what the proper role is. As defined by political scientist Peter Cistone, socialization of board members is "the process by which individuals selectively acquire the values and attitudes, interests and dispositions, skills and knowledge . . ." of the group to which they belong or seek membership.[24] Most other discussions about socialization also include, as this report does, the notion of learning the accepted behavior of a specific role.

Which role: delegate or trustee?

From his research more than a dozen years ago, Norman Kerr concluded that the socialization process resulted in school board members seeing their role as *legitimating* or defending the policies of the school system, especially the school administration, to the community rather than representing the community to the school system.[25]

The relationship between board members and the public to which they are responsible has been the source of some of the confusion about the "proper" school board role. While little research has been reported on this topic as it involves school board members, the relationship between an elected official and his constituency has been explored in many studies of other decision-making bodies such as Congress, state legislatures, and city and county councils. These studies have revealed two basic orientations to representation: the "delegate" and the "trustee." A *delegate* views his obligation as a representative to do what the public wants him to do, disregarding his own personal preference. The *trustee*, however, believes he should vote his own convic-

tion, regardless of what the public wants him to do.

In an article written by the author some years ago for *The American School Board Journal*, these two types of representational roles were discussed and applied to school board members.[26] While most board members probably would say their positions would be somewhere between these two extremes, when forced to choose, an overwhelming majority selected the trustee alternative, indicating that they would prefer to rely on their own judgment in making decisions rather than trying to reflect the wishes of their constituents.

In a subsequent study, board members in small or medium-sized school districts were more likely to choose the *delegate* role. A possible explanation for this is the close, frequent and personal communications they enjoy with their constituents. However, the fact remains that school board members in general clearly prefer the *trustee* role.

Legislature v. corporation board

A related, more general way of examining the school board role is to ask a board member whether the school board is more like a *legislature* or a *corporation board* of trustees. In order to investigate this, the following question was asked on the 1978 survey:

> Which of the following most clearly reflects your point of view?
>
> A school board should be like a legislature. It acts to create the best policies, through open debate. It watches vigilantly the progress of its policies. Each representative acts as a representative or "ombudsman" for a constituency.
>
> A school board should be like a corporation board of trustees. It acts to set general goals. Periodically it reviews with staff the status of the institution. Its members generally act as a team to support the work of the institution.

Responses to this question were quite evenly distributed, indicating much less consensus than the delegate-trustee choice. A slight majority (56%) favored the corporation board alternative, with a substantial number (44%) choosing the legislative option.[27] Responses to this question suggest a greater willingness by board members to consider the political dimensions of their role and its representational obligations than typical responses to a delegate-trustee question would indicate.

Board members were more likely to opt for the *legislature* conception of the school board role if they represent very large districts (25,000 students or more), if they represent either rural or urban districts (rather than small-town or suburban districts), if they were in their first term of office, or if they were less than 40 years old.

Informal rules

Besides asking board members about their more general orientations to the school board position, that is, their "role," the survey also attempted to uncover the informal rules that seem to govern school board behavior. These unofficial, unwritten rules often are referred to as "norms" in discussions of school board member socialization by Peter Cistone and other researchers. The 1978 convention survey asked board members to react to a series of possible "norms," and to indicate whether these norms were operative on their boards and whether they believed each to be a wise or unwise rule of behavior.

The question and the responses generated by it are presented in Table 9. Eleven unofficial rules were listed. For the sake of discussion, these eleven can be grouped into four general categories.

Rules A, I and J represent rules dealing with **standard operating procedures** for the school board. Rules B, G, H and K pertain to **internal board relationships and the decision-making process.** Rules D, E and F relate to the proper **division-of-authority between the superintendent and the board.** Rule C involves the **relationship between the school board and the community.**

The board and the community

Rule C is considered first since it closely relates to earlier discussions about representa-

TABLE 9

Unofficial, Unwritten Rules of Behavior for School Board Members

Rule	*Does this rule operate?* Yes %	No %	Not sure %	*Is this rule wise?* Wise %	Unwise %
A. New board members should serve an "apprenticeship." For the first few months they should generally keep quiet and "learn the ropes."	28	66	6	41	59
B. In most cases, it is desirable for the board to avoid conflict (e.g., split votes) in making its decisions.	34	63	3	39	61
C. Board members should not try to represent a specific group or constituency in the community but should seek to represent all the people.	80	15	5	91	9
D. Board members should devote the major part of their efforts to decisions relating to new buildings or school finances since they can contribute most in these areas.	12	83	5	13	87
E. The board should leave curriculum issues to the professional staff.	39	51	10	37	63
F. Board members should rely on the superintendent for information about the school system and not go "snooping around" on their own.	38	54	8	42	58
G. A fellow board member should never be personally criticized in public.	65	28	7	82	18
H. Maintaining friendly relationships with board member colleagues is very important.	76	15	8	92	8
I. It is very important to learn the procedural rules of the board.	88	9	3	98	2
J. Important school board work should be done in regular board meetings rather than in board committees.	72	22	5	79	21
K. An acceptable practice is to vote in a certain way on a matter you care little about in order to gain the vote of a fellow board member on a matter you do care about.	9	85	6	11	89

tion. It is obvious from the responses that there is clear consensus on this rule. Nearly all of the respondents believe it is wise for board members to seek to represent all the people in their district rather than trying to represent a specific group or constituency. Almost as many respondents report that this rule is, in fact, in operation on their own boards.

In accepting Rule C, board members once again seem to be projecting a non-political stance. The endorsement of this rule may also be indicative of some political naivete on the part of board members. While the notion that politics must be kept out of education has been dismissed by many educators, including board members, as being unrealistic, if not impossible, remnants of this belief remain, as we shall see throughout the discussion of school board norms. In this case, accepting the idea that one can represent "all the people" suggests that on most issues to come before the board there is one "best" solution. Unfortunately, this is usually not the case. Nearly all political decisions—those affecting large numbers of people in significant ways—involve hard choices. This is true of most of the important decisions that school board members are called upon to make because these decisions have an impact on people's most valuable "possessions"—their children and their pocketbooks. Further, these major decisions are likely to please some indi-

viduals and offend others. Thus, an individual board member's decision often will come down to a choice between pleasing one group or pleasing another.

Procedural norms

Rules A, I and J, involving operating procedures, all *seem* rather noncontroversial. This is particularly true of Rule I, but even this norm has definite political implications. It is clear from the responses to this item that virtually all board members agree that it is wise to learn procedural rules of the board, and nearly all the respondents said that this norm is followed by board members in their district. But, if new board members are not careful, they may allow themselves to become preoccupied with procedures to the exclusion of substance. In his provocative discussion of school board member socialization, cited earlier, Norman Kerr suggests that school administrators often will attempt to overwhelm new school board members with procedures, school district data, and other paperwork, implying that these documents should be "mastered" before the new member actively participates in board business. In so doing, the administrator diverts the attention of the board member, at least temporarily, from the substantive issues before the board.

Studies of other decision-making bodies suggest that mastery of an organization's procedural rules is not necessary for effective participation. Even members of Congress realize that if they wait to master the procedures, they might never get involved in decision-making. In a study of legislative norms in Congress, one member of Congress said:

> "Most members never come close to knowing the procedures at all, yet they can do a lot. Freshmen [first-term members] need know only the amenities and not the rules."[28]

Rule J, involving school board committees, seems, at first glance, similarly noncontroversial, but it too has political consequences. The vast majority of board members accept as wise a rule which states that important school board work should not be done in committees. What some may not realize is that they are rejecting a process which would allow some board members to *specialize* in certain decisional areas. Board member specialization may be quite threatening to the superintendent because it provides the potential for a board member to achieve expertise on an educational matter which may rival that of the superintendent. It also allows the opportunity for such a board member to provide "expert" information to other board members which might run counter to advice provided by the superintendent. The issue of information emerges again later in this chapter.

The "apprenticeship" rule, Rule A in Table 9, is related in content to the two rules just discussed; however, there is little consensus on the wisdom of this norm, with 41% of the respondents agreeing—and 59% disagreeing—that it is wise for new board members to keep quiet for a few months and "learn the ropes." Only 28% said that this informal rule operates on their boards. Conversations with board members suggest that many do not accept this as a wise rule because they believe new board members have something to contribute and that they should be allowed to do so as soon as possible. After all, as was pointed out in the preceding chapter, approximately one-quarter of all board members are in their first year of service at any given time and it would be a tremendous waste of human resources to exclude these individuals and the contributions they might make. On the other hand, some of the board members interviewed for this study indicated a willingness to accept an apprenticeship role, but one with different connotations than the one included on the survey. They emphasized that new board members should not "keep quiet" during an apprenticeship period (anywhere from 6 to 12 months). On the contrary, they believe the new board member ought to ask frequent questions in order to learn as much as he can as quickly as possible. In a sense, then, such an "apprentice" role would encourage more rather than less talk.

Division-of-authority

Next we consider a set of informal rules relating to the division-of-authority between the

superintendent and the school board (rules D, E and F in Table 9). The first two of these—suggesting that board members should devote the majority of their efforts to decisions relating to buildings and finances and should be less involved in curriculum decisions—were both declared to be unwise by a majority of the board members responding to our survey. Nearly 90% thought Rule D (relating to buildings and finances) was unwise while 63% thought E (leaving curriculum matters to the superintendent) was unwise. Approximately the same percentages indicated that these rules were not in operation on their boards.

These responses suggest that the vast majority of board members are no longer as willing to accept the notions of board science which may have existed ten or fifteen years ago. They realize that policy-making—their legitimate overriding responsibility—clearly includes curriculum policy.

Greater board involvement in policy-making, including curriculum policy, is somewhat dependent upon the board's access to information, the subject of Rule F. Respondents were quite evenly divided in their feelings about the wisdom of this rule, which directs board members to rely on the superintendent for information. About 40% thought this is wise while the remaining three-fifths thought this rule is unwise. Nearly 40% said that such a rule does not operate on their boards.

The proper source of school board information clearly is an issue upon which there is no cut-and-dry agreement. It is a controversial issue, as evidenced by Professor James Guthrie's 1974 *American School Board Journal* article, which argued in favor of an independent staff for school boards whose major purpose would be to provide board members with information needed for making decisions.[29] Guthrie's arguments generated vehement opposition in subsequent letters and articles. The opponents' basic argument was that if the superintendent would not provide the board with adequate information, they should find a superintendent who would.[30]

All of these norms concerning division-of-authority between the board and the superintendent lead to the well-known policy-administration rule: boards should stick to *policy-making* and let the superintendent *administer* the schools. The responses to items D, E and F in Table 9 suggest that board members are increasingly unwilling to allow the policy-administration rule to be used against them to decrease their power. Increasingly, they are exercising their *right* to be involved in curriculum policy, for example. Because they are the legally vested policy-makers, board members have a right to be informed about what's happening in their school systems. Even the wording of Rule F did not intimidate a board member from Minnesota who, in an interview, admitted that she did a lot of snooping. While following protocol, she walked in and out of classrooms because she believed she had a right to know what was going on in them—that was her job.

School board members are beginning to realize that the traditional distinction between policy and administration may not be that clear cut. As Paul Salmon, Executive Director of the American Association of School Administrators (AASA) recently put it, superintendents make *professional* decisions while boards make *political* decisions: a superintendent makes a recommendation to the board based on his professional background, and the board, then, accepts, rejects, or modifies his suggestion based on "what will fly" and what board members think the community's best interests are.

The decision-making process

Having concluded that school board members are political decision-makers, it is now appropriate to examine the last set of informal rules (B, G, H and K) which relate specifically to the ways in which board members go about making these decisions. While rules G and H seem only to involve interpersonal relations, they have an important bearing on decision-making, particularly when viewed in combination with Rule B. They define, in fact, the "amenities" referred to earlier as being more important than procedures. Notice in Table 9 that there is nearly unanimous agreement that Rule H—which asserts the importance of maintaining friendly relationships among members of the board—is a wise

rule. Also, more than three-fourths of the respondents report that this rule does operate on their boards. Rule G—which states that a fellow board member should never be personally criticized in public—is closely related to H and is also deemed wise by a substantial majority of the respondents. About two-thirds believe it operates on their boards.

Rules G and H are important in decision-making because they help provide a more open, less contentious atmosphere in which to carry on school board business. Political scientists first noticed such rules operating in the U.S. Senate, where even bitter political enemies usually treat each other with the utmost courtesy and respect. Senators seemed to realize instinctively that when potentially bitter and controversial issues are being debated, an atmosphere of cordiality is almost essential if rational discussion and meaningful work are to take place. Fledgling senators were advised to attack their adversary's *positions* without attacking the opponent personally. This rule still is observed by most members of Congress, by members of many state and local policy-making bodies and, according to the 1978 NSBA survey, by most school board members.

In the past, however, some have tried to extend these rules, in the hope of eliminating conflict on school boards altogether. Some writers of material for and about school board members have argued that school board conflict has only negative consequences and should be avoided at all costs. For example, Edward M. Tuttle's well-known book, *School Board Leadership in America*,[31] contains quite an explicit no-conflict rule. Tuttle suggests that new board members should be initiated into accepting the principle of unity as an operating norm of behavior to prevent boards and the communities they represent from being "ripped asunder by controversy."[32]

The convention survey reveals that a substantial minority of board members still believe that unanimity is a wise practice: about an equal percentage of the respondents reported a no-conflict norm operating on their boards (see Table 9, item B). However, a majority of the survey respondents said that a rule stating that it is desirable for a board to avoid "split votes" in making its decisions is unwise. They apparently accept the argument first made by H. Thomas James that school board conflict is inevitable.[33]

Board members interviewed for this study tended to support the majority position—that a "no-conflict" norm is unwise. The only exception was a board member from Ohio who, during an interview, aruged that unanimity should be attempted on important issues, especially decisions asking for a millage vote in the school district. He believed—and he probably was right—that this would enhance the chances for successful passage of the millage. Another board member argued that split votes are less likely if the superintendent provides ample information on the issue. However, most board members probably would agree with the board member from Illinois who said that school board conflict is healthy, if it is honest and based on genuinely different points-of-view.

This is essentially the point made in a recent article by the author in *The American School Board Journal*.[34] In discussing the myths and realities of divided school boards, it was argued that conflict is a basic component of the decision-making process in a democracy and that divided school boards were often simply reflecting differences which existed in their school districts.

The only rule still to be discussed is Rule K, which may be the most controversial of all since it involves the overtly political practice of vote-trading (often referred to as "logrolling"). Only about ten percent of the board members consider this to be a wise rule, with a similar percentage saying it exists on their boards. Here, again, board members appear to be rejecting a political tactic as they did in connection with Rule C and the delegate-trustee distinction. While it may be very defensible to say that one votes "for the children" on every issue, this position rejects traditional American political concepts like bargaining and compromise. While discussions in this report suggest that board members are more willing than they ever were to

accept many of the *political* ramifications of their role, they apparently still wish to remain "above politics" to some extent.

Summing up the socialization experience

In conclusion, three general points emerge from these findings about the school board member socialization experience:

- School board members are no longer willing to accept some of the norms of behavior that they apparently followed a few years ago. Most are not willing to accept the traditional role definition which emphasizes decisions concerning school finances and the physical plant ("budgets, buildings and boundaries"), and many are unwilling to rely solely on the superintendent for information.
- The "proper" school board role is still an elusive notion, as is illustrated by the diversity of opinion concerning the wisdom of several of the preceding norms.
- School board members are ambivalent about how political their role really should be. This ambivalence is most obvious in responses to questions about representation and about the crucial act in the decision-making process: the vote. Despite this ambivalence, however, it appears that many board members are coming to accept the idea, albeit grudgingly in some cases, that an effective board member must accept the political dimensions of his role and behave accordingly.

Summary: The Portrait Reviewed

The goal of this report was to broaden knowledge about new school board members; to better understand the kinds of experiences and activities they endured in that critical period of time just before and just after their selection. A complete summary of the findings will not be attempted here—this has already been done in the introduction to this report. However, a few key highlights from the report—and the implications for school board members and other educational leaders—will be considered very briefly.

Clearly, the past experiences of new school board members do not prepare them adequately for what they face upon assuming office. This finding is underlined by the general public's lack of understanding of the role and functions of school boards. The obvious implication of this is that school board *candidates* somehow need to be more fully and realistically informed about what is in store for them if they are successful. One possible means for accomplishing this would be an orientation program for all announced candidates. Increased awareness of the role and function of the school board could be an important byproduct of such programs. This would result from the interaction which naturally takes place between candidates and voters during the pre-election period.

The 1978 NSBA survey reveals that school board campaign strategies are largely informal, indirect and inexpensive. One implication of this finding is that the kind of communication skills used by successful school board candidates in campaigning might be adapted to their *representational* responsibilities. Obviously, a continuing dialogue between board members and the constituencies they represent could well promote healthier, more meaningful support for the schools.

The relatively long period of time it takes for new board members to feel comfortable and capable in their roles is a key finding of this study. The clear implication: there is a need for more systematic training and development programs at the local, school district level. While the resources of state associations and NSBA would be important in this effort, the 1978 survey reveals that board members support a *locally* based orientation program using *local* people as primary resources.

Finally, it appears that school board members are beginning to come to grips with their role as *political* actors and are asserting their desire for greater involvement in the decision-making process. This finding suggests that those who are responsible for orientation programs at the state and national levels should consider giving more attention to training new board members in the political dimensions of their role. Clearly, this will be a difficult task because of the lack of consensus as to how "political" the school board member should be. There is no reason why, however, school board orientation programs should not begin to at least discuss political topics such as representation, divided boards and split votes, unwritten rules and subject-matter specialization.

Hopefully, the information presented in this report will assist in strengthening and accelerating the training, orientation and de-

velopment of truly effective school board members. Truly, these individuals represent a strategic resource in the maintenance and improvement of one of the most important institutions in our democratic system—the public schools.

Appendix A: Tables

TABLE 4

School Board Campaign Strategies

*To what extent did you use each of the following **strategies** in your **first campaign** for election to the board?*

	A great deal %	Some %	Not at all* %
Talking to influential people in the community	30	54	16
Buying newspaper ads	7	45	48
Buying radio or television ads	3	12	84
Seeking free newspaper exposure	13	40	48
Seeking free radio or television exposure	3	12	85
Door-to-door campaigning	33	25	42
Campaigning in shopping centers	5	13	82
Sponsoring coffees	16	22	62
Speeches to civic groups	17	39	44
Speeches to educational groups, such as PTA	17	41	42
Seeking endorsements	14	30	56
Mobilizing a campaign organization	26	23	52

* Some percentages do not total to 100% due to rounding. For this item, there were a substantial number of non-responses; percentages were calculated for those responding. This number varied between 575 and 708.

TABLE 5

Campaign Expenditures

Approximately how much money did you spend on campaigning during your first campaign for the board?

Amount	Personal Expenditure %	Supporters' Expenditures %	Total Expenditures %
$0	40	61	38
$1-99	38	13	26
$100-499	18	15	21
$500 or more	5	12	15

TABLE 6

Total Spent in First Campaign By Region, Sex, and Type of District

	Region			
	East %	Midwest %	South %	West %
$0	29	45	30	36
$1-99	32	29	14	23
$100-499	26	17	26	22
$500 or more	13	8	30	20

	Sex of Board Member	
	Female %	Male %
$0	30	41
$1-99	28	25
$100-499	23	20
$500 or more	19	14

	Type of District			
	Urban %	Suburban %	Small Town %	Rural %
$0	23	23	44	52
$1-99	6	25	29	33
$100-499	14	32	20	12
$500 or more	56	21	8	3

TABLE 7

The Orientation of New Board Members

*Most new school board members require some orientation to their local school district. In your school district, who takes the **major** responsibility for orientation to each of these aspects of boardsmanship*

Area of Responsibility	The new board member %	President of the board %	Superintendent of schools or the staff %	The state school boards association %	Other %
Facts about the local district	20	10	66	2	2
Issues currently before the board	15	29	52	1	2
The budget process	10	5	78	2	5
The hiring process	12	6	80	1	1
The district's written policies	18	12	67	2	2
The role a board member plays	20	25	21	31	3
School board procedures	15	36	32	15	2
The program of your state school boards association	7	6	19	66	2

Appendix B: Information on the Sample

1. Number of respondents: 986
2. District size

Less than 1000 students	17%
1000-4999	49
5000-9999	16
10,000-24,999	11
25,000 or more	7
	100%

3. Sex of respondent

Male = 70% Female = 30%

4. Age

Less than 30	1%
In their 30's	23
40's	44
50's	25
60 or more	7
	100%

5. Respondents' description of their school district

Urban	9%
Suburban	33
Small Town	31
Rural	28
	101%*

* *Does not total to 100% due to rounding.*

Appendix C: The Questionnaire

Dear 1978 NSBA Convention Attendee;

Please take a few minutes to share with us some of your experiences and ideas. Each year, through surveys such as this, NSBA attempts to learn more about the operations of school boards, so that we can better understand and serve. *Please be candid. This questionnaire is anonymous.*

Please return your completed questionnaire to an usher or usherette as you leave this Clinic session. If this is not possible, please return your questionnaire to the NSBA Information Booth in the Registration area or to the NSBA Booth on the Exhibit floor. Thank you.

1. How many students are there in your school district? _____

2. Are you (1) _____ Male or (2) _____ Female?

3. In what state is your school district located? _____

4. What is your age? _____

5. Would you describe your school district as predominantly (Check one)

   (1) _____ Rural? (3) _____ Suburban?
   (2) _____ Small town? (4) _____ Urban?

6. What is your position in your school district?

   (1) _____ School Board Member (*Please go on to question #7*)
   (2) _____ Superintendent (*Please go on to question #18*)
   (3) _____ Other (Explain: _____) (*Please go on to question #18*)

7. When did you begin serving on the school board? Month _____ Year 19____

8. How were you *first* selected to serve on the school board?

   (1) _____ Appointed to an appointive board (Appointed by whom?_____)
   (*Please go on to question #14*)
   (2) _____ Appointed to an elective board (Appointed by whom? _____)
   (*If you have never been elected, please go on to question #14. If you have since been elected, please go on to question #9.*)
   (3) _____ Elected in a partisan election (Please go on to question #9)
   (4) _____ Elected in a non-partisan election (*Please go on to question #9*)

9. The first time you were *elected* to the school board, which of the following occurred? (Check *all* that apply)

(1) _____ I was unopposed.
(2) _____ I had one opponent.
(3) _____ I had more than one opponent.
(4) _____ I won by a wide margin (at least 10% more votes than nearest opponent).
(5) _____ I won by a narrow margin (less than 10% margin).

10. The first time you were elected to the school board, how much *conflict* or *controversy* was generated by the school board election?

(1) _____ A great deal
(2) _____ Moderate amount
(3) _____ A little
(4) _____ Almost none

11. In your *first* campaign for the school board, were any of the following important campaign issues? If so, check the *most* important (up to *three*).

(1) _____ Student discipline
(2) _____ Teacher militancy
(3) _____ Rising costs
(4) _____ School taxes
(5) _____ Drop-out rates
(6) _____ "Back-to-Basics"
(7) _____ Appropriate text books
(8) _____ The superintendent's performance
(9) _____ Accountability
(10) _____ Federal interference
(11) _____ Busing
(12) _____ Declining enrollment
(13) _____ Declining student achievement
(14) _____ Other (what? _____)

12. To what extent did you use each of the following *strategies* in your *first* campaign for election to the board?

	A great deal	Some	Not at all
A. Talking to influential people in the community	(1) _____	(2) _____	(3) _____
B. Buying newspaper ads	(1) _____	(2) _____	(3) _____
C. Buying radio or television ads	(1) _____	(2) _____	(3) _____
D. Seeking free newspaper exposure	(1) _____	(2) _____	(3) _____
E. Seeking free radio or television exposure	(1) _____	(2) _____	(3) _____
F. Door-to-door campaigning	(1) _____	(2) _____	(3) _____
G. Campaigning in shopping centers	(1) _____	(2) _____	(3) _____
H. Sponsoring coffees	(1) _____	(2) _____	(3) _____
I. Speeches to civic groups	(1) _____	(2) _____	(3) _____
J. Speeches to educational groups, like PTA	(1) _____	(2) _____	(3) _____
K. Seeking endorsements	(1) _____	(2) _____	(3) _____
L. Mobilizing a campaign organization	(1) _____	(2) _____	(3) _____
M. Other (what? _____)	(1) _____	(2) _____	(3) _____

13. Approximately how much money did you spend on campaigning during your *first* campaign for the board?

$ _____ out of my own pocket
$ _____ by my supporters
$ _____ TOTAL

14. Before you began service on the board, in which of the following activities had you participated? (Check *all* that apply)

(1) _____ Been a candidate in an election (not for the school board)
(2) _____ Served in a governmental position (what position? _____)
(3) _____ Served on a corporation board of directors
(4) _____ Served on other board(s) (what boards? _____
_____)
(5) _____ Been employed by a public school system (in what roles? _____
_____)
(6) _____ Been an unsuccessful candidate for the school board
(7) _____ Attended at least *one* school board meeting in the previous 12 months
(8) _____ Attended at least *five* school board meetings in the previous 12 months
(9) _____ Been a PTA member
(10) _____ Been a PTA officer
(11) _____ Served on a committee appointed by the school board or school administration

15. At the time you were first appointed or elected to the school board:
What was your occupation? _____
What was your job title? _____
By whom were you employed? _____

16. About how long did it take you as a new board member to become a capable, comfortable, fully-informed member of the school board?

(1) _____ 3 months or less
(2) _____ 4-6 months
(3) _____ 7-11 months
(4) _____ One year
(5) _____ Longer than one year

17. Below are listed several areas of school board concern. In column A, check the *two* areas you *thought* the school board would deal with the most *before* you became a board member. In column B, check the *two* areas you found you actually did deal with the most.

	A	B
School expenditures	(1) _____	(2) _____
School taxes	(1) _____	(2) _____
Hiring teachers	(1) _____	(2) _____
Hiring administrators	(1) _____	(2) _____
Curriculum decisions	(1) _____	(2) _____
Textbook selection	(1) _____	(2) _____
Transportation (including busing)	(1) _____	(2) _____
New school buildings	(1) _____	(2) _____
Decisions involving enrollment	(1) _____	(2) _____
Collective bargaining	(1) _____	(2) _____
Discipline	(1) _____	(2) _____
Other (what? _____)	(1) _____	(2) _____

18. Most new school board members require some orientation to their local school district. In your school district, who takes the *major* responsibility for orientation to each of these aspects of boardmanship?

	The new board member	The president of the board	The superintendent of schools or the staff	The state school boards association	Other (Please explain)
Facts about the local district	(1) ____	(2) ____	(3) ____	(4) ____	(5) ____
Issues currently before the board	(1) ____	(2) ____	(3) ____	(4) ____	(5) ____
The budget process	(1) ____	(2) ____	(3) ____	(4) ____	(5) ____
The hiring process	(1) ____	(2) ____	(3) ____	(4) ____	(5) ____
The district's written policies	(1) ____	(2) ____	(3) ____	(4) ____	(5) ____
The *role* a board member plays	(1) ____	(2) ____	(3) ____	(4) ____	(5) ____
School board procedures	(1) ____	(2) ____	(3) ____	(4) ____	(5) ____
The program of your state school boards association	(1) ____	(2) ____	(3) ____	(4) ____	(5) ____

19. Did you ever attend a workshop which was designed to orient new board members, sponsored by your state school boards association?

(1) ____ Yes; it was not very useful.
(2) ____ Yes; it was useful.
(3) ____ Yes; it was invaluable.
(4) ____ No.

20. Did you ever receive a handbook on 'boardmanship' published by your state school boards association?

(1) ____ Yes; but I have never read it.
(2) ____ Yes; I read it at the time.
(3) ____ Yes; I refer to it occasionally.
(4) ____ Yes; I refer to it all the time.
(5) ____ No.

21. Consider *all* the people, resources, and opportunities which help a person become an effective board member. In your experience, which of the following are *most* helpful? (Check up to 3)

(1) ____ Experienced board member(s)
(2) ____ Superintendent
(3) ____ Other staff professionals (teachers and principals)
(4) ____ State department of education orientation sessions
(5) ____ Boardmanship handbook
(6) ____ State association orientation sessions
(7) ____ State association publications
(8) ____ Regular state association conventions
(9) ____ NSBA Convention
(10) ____ NSBA publications
(11) ____ NSBA Academy programs
(12) ____ Other (Please indicate: ____ ____)

22. Do you agree?

	Agree	Disagree
School board elections should be partisan (Republican-Democrat) rather than non-partisan.	(1) ____	(2) ____

23. Do you agree?

	Agree	Disagree
The superintendent in your district has too much influence over the school board.	(1) ____	(2) ____

24. Which of the following most clearly reflects your point of view?

(1) _____ A school board should be like a legislature. (It acts to create the best policies, through open debate. It watches vigilantly the progress of its policies. Each representative acts as a representative or "ombudsman" for a constituency.)

(2) _____ A school board should be like a corporation board of trustees. (It acts to set general goals. Periodically it reviews with staff the status of the institution. Its members generally act as a team to support the work of the institution.)

25. Below are listed some unofficial, unwritten rules of behavior which sometimes exist in local districts. Do these "rules" seem to be operating in your district? Do you think each of these "rules" is wise or unwise for board members to learn?

	a) Does this rule operate?			*b) Is this rule wise?*	
	Yes	*No*	*Not sure*	*Wise*	*Unwise*
A. New board members should serve an "apprenticeship." For the first few months they should generally keep quiet and "learn the ropes."	(1) ____	(2) ____	(3) ____	(1) ____	(2) ____
B. In most cases, it is desirable for the board to avoid conflict (e.g., split votes) in making its decisions.	(1) ____	(2) ____	(3) ____	(1) ____	(2) ____
C. Board members should not try to represent a specific group or constituency in the community but should seek to represent all the people.	(1) ____	(2) ____	(3) ____	(1) ____	(2) ____
D. Board members should devote the major part of their efforts to decisions relating to new buildings or school finances since they can contribute most in these areas.	(1) ____	(2) ____	(3) ____	(1) ____	(2) ____
E. The board should leave curriculum issues to the professional staff.	(1) ____	(2) ____	(3) ____	(1) ____	(2) ____
F. Board members should rely on the superintendent for information about the school system and not go "snooping around" on their own.	(1) ____	(2) ____	(3) ____	(1) ____	(2) ____

G. A fellow board member should never be personally criticized in public. (1) ____ (2) ____ (3) ____ (1) ____ (2) ____

H. Maintaining friendly relationships with board member colleagues is very important. (1) ____ (2) ____ (3) ____ (1) ____ (2) ____

I. It is very important to learn the procedural rules of the board. (1) ____ (2) ____ (3) ____ (1) ____ (2) ____

J. Important school board work should be done in regular board meetings rather than in board committees. (1) ____ (2) ____ (3) ____ (1) ____ (2) ____

K. An acceptable practice is to vote a certain way on a matter you care little about in order to gain the vote of a fellow board member on a matter you do care about. (1) ____ (2) ____ (3) ____ (1) ____ (2) ____

Notes

[1] The author is indebted to Peter Cistone's research and his comprehensive review of the literature which have provided a basis for organizing and discussing many of the ideas presented in this report. See Peter J. Cistone, "The Recruitment and Socialization of School Board Members," in *Understanding School Boards* (ed.) Peter J. Cistone (Lexington, Massachusetts: Lexington Books, 1975), pp. 47-61.

[2] George S. Counts, *The Social Composition of Boards of Education* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1927); A recent study is the National School Boards Association's *Women on School Boards* (Washington, D.C.: NSBA, 1974), cited below as NSBA, 1974. Some idea as to the amount of research devoted to this aspect of board member selection is conveyed by W. W. Charters, Jr., who in 1953 located sixty-two separate studies on social composition, none of which departed significantly from the original finding reported by Counts. See Charters, "Social Class Analysis and the Control of Public Education," *Harvard Educational Review*, 23 (Fall, 1953), pp. 268-70.

[3] Cistone, *op. cit.*, pp. 53-54.

[4] NSBA, 1974, *op. cit.*

[5] Harold V. Webb, "A New Gallup Study: What the Public *Really* Thinks of its School Boards," *The American School Board Journal*, 162 (April, 1975), p. 36. See also Paul D. Blanchard, "Educational Decision-Making: An Important But Neglected Part of the Social Studies Curriculum," *Southern Social Studies Quarterly*, 3 (Fall, 1977), pp. 28-30.

[6] On this point, see Paul D. Blanchard, "Why School Board Meetings are the Way They Are," *The American School Board Journal*, 164 (November, 1977).

[7] Robert L. Crain, *The Politics of School Desegregation* (Chicago: Aldine, 1968); Joseph M. Cronin, *The Control of Urban Schools* (New York: Free Press, 1973), both cited in Cistone, *op. cit.*, p. 55.

[8] David W. Minar, "The Community Basis of Conflict in School System Politics," *American Sociological Review*, 31 (June, 1966), pp. 822-835; Louis H. Masotti, *Education and Politics in Suburbia* (Cleveland: Press of Western Reserve University, 1967).

[9] L. Harmon Zeigler and M. Kent Jennings, *Governing American Schools* (North Scituate, Massachusetts: Duxbury Press, 1974).

[10] Keith Goldhammer, *The School Board* (New York: Center for Applied Research in Education, 1964), pp. 28-30.

[11] Zeigler and Jennings, *op. cit.*, p. 36.

[12] George H. Gallup, "The Tenth Annual Gallup Poll of the Public's Attitudes Toward the Public Schools," *Phi Delta Kappan*, 60 (September, 1978), p. 34.

[13] *Ibid.*, p. 36.

[14] M. Kent Jennings, "Patterns of School Board Responsiveness," in *Understanding School Boards*, *op. cit.*, p. 241.

[15] This assertion is based on the increase in the number of female board members. While there is some uncertainty about the exact proportion of women serving on school boards, several NSBA studies indicate that it is clearly on the rise. The author is unaware of any study which has investigated the number of female *candidates* for the school board.

[16] See especially, National School Boards Association, *Women on School Boards* (NSBA, 1974); Carolyn Mullins, "If Superintendents Could Pick Their Own School Board Members . . . ," *The American School Board Journal*, 161 (September, 1974); and Paul D. Blanchard, "School Boards and Sex Discrimination: Problems and Prospects."

[17] They are apparently not valid for a large proportion of female respondents to the survey who, as suggested earlier, won by large margins. Perhaps initial obstacles were overcome by vigorous campaigning.

[18] Paul D. Blanchard, "Women in Public Education: The Impact of Female School Board Members," *Journal of Humanics*, 4 (May, 1977), pp. 66-67.

[19] This tendency also was present in the 1978 survey data, but it was less pronounced.

[20] Blanchard, "Women in Public Education . . . ," *op. cit.* See also Paul D. Blanchard, "School Boards and

Sex Discrimination: Problems and Prospects," *Tempo*, 2 (May, 1977), available in the ERIC collection (ED 139 116).

[21] Some insight into regional differences might be gained by reading Paul D. Blanchard and Robert L. Kline, "The Importance of Regionalism in the Decision-Making Style of Local Boards of Education," unpublished but available in the ERIC collection, ED 136 377.

[22] James D. Koerner, *Who Controls American Education?* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1968), p. 122.

[23] Goldhammer, *op. cit.*, p. 10.

[24] Cistone, *op. cit.*

[25] A good summary of the Kerr article may be read in Cistone, *op. cit.*, pp. 56-58.

[26] Paul D. Blanchard, "Most School Board Members are Their Own Men . . . ," *The American School Board Journal*, 161 (May, 1974).

[27] Interesting and significant was the fact that superintendents who participated in the survey (n = 93), whose responses are not included in this analysis, were much more favorable to the corporation board conception of the school board role; 76% chose this alternative.

[28] Herbert B. Asher, "The Learning of Legislative Norms," *American Political Science Review*, 68 (June, 1973), p. 503.

[29] James W. Guthrie, "Should Your Board Hire its Own Staff—Independent of Your Superintendent?" *The American School Board Journal*, 161 (October, 1974).

[30] See, for example, Palmer G. Campen, "Why School Boards *Don't* Need Their Own Staffs, Independent of the Superintendent," *The American School Board Journal*, 162 (February, 1975).

[31] (Danville, Ill., Interstate Printers and Publishers, 1958).

[32] *Ibid.*, pp. 30, 98, 129. See also Charles E. Reeves, *School Boards: Their Status, Functions, and Activities* (New York: Prentice-Hall, 1954), pp. 260-61 for a similar discussion.

[33] H. Thomas James, "School Board Conflict is Inevitable," *The American School Board Journal*, 154 (March, 1967), pp. 5-9.

[34] Blanchard, "The Myth of the Divided School Board," *op. cit.*